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A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL POLITICAL SYSTEM DESCRIBED IN THE PREVIOUS REPORT, AA 000 264, IS PRESENTED IN THIS PAPER. THIS POLITICAL SYSTEM IS BASED ON THE AUTHOR'S DEFINITION THAT POLITICAL LIFE CONCERNS ALL THE VARIETIES OF ACTIVITY THAT SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCE THE AUTHORITATIVE OR BINDING ALLOCATIONS OF VALUES ADOPTED FOR SOCIETY. AN EXPLANATION IS GIVEN OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THREE OF THE CONCEPTS (ALLOCATION OF VALUES, AUTHORITY, AND SOCIETY) THAT ARE ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THIS DEFINITION. VIEWING POLITICAL LIFE AS A SYSTEM OF BEHAVIOR, THE AUTHOR USES TECHNIQUES OF SYSTEMS ANALYSIS TO CONCEPTUALIZE THE SCIENCE OF POLITICS. THIS PAPER WAS WRITTEN AS PART OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION CONSORTIUM, A CURRICULUM PROJECT DESIGNED TO OUTLINE THE CONCEPTS, METHODS, AND STRUCTURE OF SEVERAL OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR USE BY TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM WORKERS AT ALL GRADE LEVELS. (JH)

SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO POLITICAL LIFE

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PREFACE

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Isaac Balbus in drawing together this paper from my previous writings. For a complete description of the conceptual framework described here, see my books as follows: The Political System (New York: Knopf, 1953); A Framework for Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965); A Systems Analysis of Political Life (New York: Wiley, 1965). Acknowledgement is also given to the publishers of the last two books for permission to reprint various passages, in revised form, drawn from these books without benefit of quotation marks.

David Easton

March 1966

FOREWORD

Professor Easton's paper, A Systems Approach to Political Life, was written as a part of a curriculum project supported by a developmental contract of the United States Office of Education, made with Purdue University for the Social Science Education Consortium. This project was directed by Lawrence Senesh, Professor of Economic Education at Purdue.

The purpose of the project was to outline the major concepts, structure and methods of several of the social sciences in a way that will be useful to persons concerned with either teaching or constructing new curriculum approaches and materials in which one or more of the social science disciplines has a prominent place. Papers similar to this one on political science have been written for anthropology, sociology, geography and economics. Also, a still briefer version of Professor Easton's theoretical system has been written by David Collier of the University of Chicago and published as Consortium paper #103, The Political System.

The immediate concern of Professor Senesh's project, of which this paper is a part, was to construct a broad curriculum outline for Grades K-6. However, the materials on the disciplines should be useful to teachers and curriculum workers at all levels.

Irving Morrissett

March 1966

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Introduction

In defining political science, we are seeking concepts to describe the most obvious and encompassing properties of the phenomena we wish to describe. The idea of a political system proves to be an appropriate and indeed unavoidable starting point in this search. Certain kinds of activity are more prominently associated with political life than others; for example, governmental organizations, pressure groups, voting, and parties. They are, of course, part of the whole social process and, therefore, they are also relevant to systems other than the political. Recurrent relationships among parts of the system suggest that the elements of political life have some form of determinate relationships. The task of research is to discover what these are.

Since all social life is interdependent, it is artificial to isolate any set of social relationships from the whole for special attention. But this artificiality is imposed on political scientists, as on all scientists, by the need to simplify their data. The analytic or mental tool for this purpose is a theoretical system, which consists, first, of a set of concepts corresponding to the important political variables and, second, of statements about the relations among these concepts.

We may sum up our common-sense perception of politics as follows: Political life concerns all those varieties of activity that influence significantly the authoritative or binding allocations of values adopted for a society. We are participating in political life whenever our activity relates in some way to the making and execution of policy for a society. This is a convenient and rough approximation to a description of politics. We must, however, attempt to further understand three concepts used in this description: allocations of values, authority, and society.

Allocations of Values

The essence of an allocation of values, the first of the three concepts, is that through it certain things are denied to some people and made accessible to others. An allocation, whether made for a society, a narrow association, or any other groups, consists of a web of decisions and actions that allocates valued things. A decision alone is of course not an allocation; arriving at a decision is only the formal phase of establishing an allocation. A legislature can decide to punish monopolists, but an administrator can destroy or reformulate the decision by failing either to discover offenders or to prosecute them vigorously. Not until we act to implement a decision, therefore, do we enter the second or effective phase of an allocation. In this phase the decision is interpreted in a series of actions and narrower decisions which may in effect establish new policy. This suggests that political science is concerned with ways in which valued things are allocated for a society, whether formally in law, or informally in practice. We often refer to these allocations as policies of the system or as its decisions, and both concepts will be used interchangeably with allocations.

It would be erroneous to urge, however, that political science attempts to understand the way in which society allocates all of its valued things; on the contrary, it is concerned only with the ways in which valued things are affected by authoritative allocations. We must inquire, therefore, into the meaning of authority, the second of the three concepts.

Authority and Society

An allocation is authoritative when the people to whom it is intended to apply or who are affected by it consider that they must or ought to obey it. It is obvious that this is a psychological rather than a moral explanation of the term. We can justify such an explanation because it gives to the term a meaning that enables us to determine whether a group of people do in practice consider a policy to be authoritative.

Political science is not, however, concerned with all authoritative allocations or policies found in a society. In organizations that are less than society-wide there are many authoritative policies; but these allocations are narrower than those that concern the political scientist. Thus, political research seeks primarily to understand the way in which valued things are

authoritatively allocated, not for a group within society, but for the whole society. The societal nature of policy is, therefore, the third conceptual criterion helpful in isolating our subject matter.

In summary, a social act is political if it relates to the authoritative allocation of valued things for a society. A political system, we shall see, consists of all the political interactions in a society.

Systems Analysis

No one way of conceptualizing any major area of human behavior will do full justice to all its variety and complexity. The conceptual orientation that I am proposing--systems analysis--stems from the fundamental decision to view political life as a system of behavior. Its major and gross unit of analysis is the political system, and this theoretical orientation will be given a specific and restricted meaning.

Systems analysis, as conceived here, is built upon the following premises and only the first two of these are shared with other modes of analysis that use the "systems" concept.

1. System: It is useful to view political life as a system of behavior.

2. Environment: A system is distinguishable from its environment and open to influence from it.

3. Response: Variation in the structures and processes within a system may usefully be interpreted as constructive alternative efforts by members of a system to regulate and cope with stress flowing from environmental as well as internal sources.

4. Feedback: The capacity of a system to persist in the face of stress depends on the flow of information, to the decision-makers in the system, about the effects of their decisions on the environment and on the system itself. The term "information" should, in this context, be construed to include influences and pressures, as well as facts.

It is the third and fourth premises which fundamentally distinguish this kind of systems analysis from other approaches to the study of political life that at least implicitly also interpret it as a system of behavior.

Systems analysis interprets political life as an entity which maintains its own boundaries while surrounded by and interacting with other social systems. It is an open system, subject to influences from outside its own perimeter. If such a system is to persist, it must obtain adequate feedback about its past performances, and it must be able to take measures that regulate its future behavior. Regulation may call for simple adaptation to changing conditions, to maintain fixed goals; or it may include efforts to modify old goals or transform them entirely. It may even be necessary for a system to transform its own internal structure or processes, in order to maintain itself as a set of activities for making and implementing binding decisions.

Systems

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to answer two questions: What is meant by a system of behavior? Does political life constitute such a system?

The concept of system will be used in two different but related senses. First, it may refer to the empirical behavior which we observe and characterize as political life, and about which we hope to develop some explanatory theory. Second, it may refer to the set of symbols through which ve hope to identify, describe, delimit and explain the behavior of the empirical system. Because a system in this sense is a set of ideas, we may call it a symbolic or theoretical system. A causal political theory is a symbolic system which has as its point of reference the behaving system we call politics. The problem is to determine the best conceptual scheme, once we attribute systemic qualities to the actions that constitute political life.

Although we have been speaking as though political life does form a system of behavior about which a system of theory can be developed, it should first be established that this is indeed the case. It might be argued that whether or not a set of interactions constitutes a system depends upon the extent to which they naturally cohere. From this point of view, systems are given in nature and it is the task of the social scientist to discover the systems that exist in nature.

On the other hand, we can argue that all systems are constructs of the mind. It is pointless, however, to distinguish between so-called natural and non-natural systems, and we shall identify as a system any aggregate of interactions that we choose, as a matter of conceptual or theoretical convenience.

The only criterion for accepting a system as worthy of study is whether it is interesting; that is, whether the selected parts of political life are relevant to a particular set of problems, show some degree of interdependence, and seem to have a common fate.

Regardless of whether social systems are artificial constructs of the mind or symbolic reproductions of naturally cohering phenomena, we cannot take it for granted that the typical elements shared by all systems are intuitively or readily known. A common sense position would be that all social systems have as their basic units individual persons. Scientifically, it is more useful, however, to view all social systems as composed of interactions among persons. These interactions form the basic units of these systems. A political system will be identified, therefore, as a set of interactions, abstracted from the totality of social behavior, through which valued things are authoritatively allocated for a society. Persons engaged in such interactions--those who are acting in political roles--will be referred to generally as the members of the system.

Environment

If the conceptualization of political life as a system impels us to identify the units of the system, it commits us also to describe the boundaries of the system, and to say something about what lies outside those boundaries.

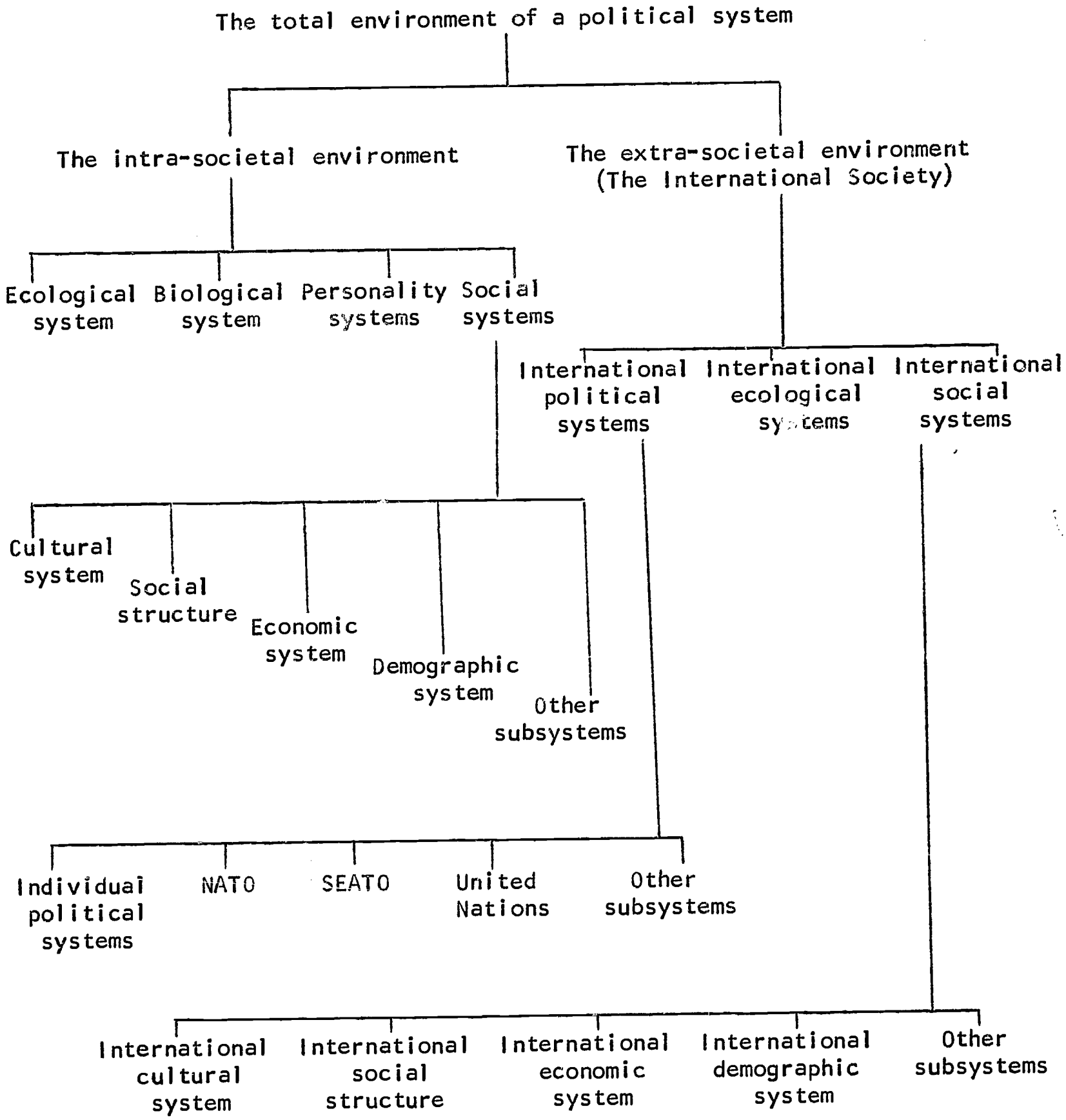
Those aspects of a society that fall outside the boundaries of a political system consist generally of all the other sub-systems of society and constitute the environment. The environment is social as well as physical; unless the context indicates otherwise, it will be used, henceforth, in both senses. This environment, with its variety of systems, is composed of two basically different types: intra-societal and extra-societal. Chart I depicts this dichotomy and indicates the various kinds of systems that are included in each. Our task will be to devise a conceptual structure for systematically and economically tracing out the interactions of the extra- and intra-societal forces with a given political system.

Response

One of the characteristic properties of every system is that it has the capacity to cope with stress exerted on its essential variables. The essential

CHART I

COMPONENTS OF THE TOTAL ENVIRONMENT OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM



variables of the political system are (1) the allocation of valued things for a society, and (2) the relative frequency of compliance with these allocations. Stress occurs when there is a danger that the essential variables will be pushed beyond what we may designate as their critical range, that is, when the political system is in danger of losing its ability to allocate valued things for a society and/or its ability to induce most members to accept these allocations as binding. A system may collapse because it has failed to take measures appropriate for handling stress. The existence of a capacity to respond to stress is of paramount importance. An assessment of this capacity can help us evaluate the probabilities that the system will be able to ward off the stresses. The special objective and merit of a systems analysis of political life is that it permits us to interpret the behavior of the members in a system in alleviating or aggravating stress on the essential variables.

How do the potentially stressful conditions from the environment communicate themselves to a political system? Common sense tells us that there is an enormous variety of environmental influences at work on a system. Do we have to treat each change in the environment as a separate and unique disturbance, of which the specific effects on the political system have to be independently worked out? Or can we devise a way of generalizing our method for handling the impact of the environment on the system, thereby reducing the enormous variety of influences to a relatively few, manageable number of indicators? I have sought to effect such a reduction through the use of the concepts "inputs" and "outputs."

Because of the analytic distinction made between a political system and its parametric, or environmental, systems, it is useful to interpret the influences emanating from the environment as exchanges or transactions that cross the boundaries of the political system. These exchanges or transactions can be summarized as the outputs of one system and, hence, the inputs of the other.

The two major inputs of the political system are demands and support.

Demands as the Inputs of a System

In any political system, demands represent one way in which the total environment leaves its impress on the system. The demands are a consequence

of a wide range of conditions and events that impinge upon the system and constitute one of the major sources of stress acting on its essential variables. In some circumstances the demands may become a potential danger to the persistence of a system. Demands set up a disturbance, the system feels the impact, its members respond or fail to do so, and the result reveals the effectiveness with which the system has managed to cope with the strain so occasioned. The sequence is one of stimulus-system-response-outcome, a pattern that will apply to the input of support as well.

A demand may be defined as an expression of opinion that a particular authoritative allocation should or should not be made. The expectation that the outcome will be accepted as binding distinguishes political demands from other kinds. We may, of course, conceive of many kinds of information being put into a political system: expectations, opinions, expression of motivations, ideologies, interests, and statements of preferences. At times these may be identical with demands; at others they may be just partial determinants of these demands. Wants, in short, only become demands if they call for action on the part of the authorities.

Demands constitute a central variable, since without them there would be no occasion to make binding decisions for a society. Demands thus provide the incentive which sparks a decision or action, taking the form of suggestions, proposals, invitations, or insistent concern for authoritative decisions or actions.

Before we can consider the stress that inputs of demands impose upon a system, we must decide how we are to determine when a demand has been "put into" the political system. Events related to the non-political roles of members of a society lead to changes in the things that they want, expect, need, prefer, or believe in. These changes help to induce and shape the expression of what members of society consider politically desirable or necessary. When such an expression occurs, we say that a demand has been "put into" the political system.

Demands have the capacity to impose strains on a system by driving its essential variables toward their critical limits. If the inflow of demands is so heavy or of such a kind as to require excessive time for processing, they may undermine the capacity of a system to produce authoritative decisions. The more time-consuming the demands, the more threatening they are to the

viability of any political system. If there were no ways of limiting volume and regulating content, large numbers of demands might go unsatisfied. And if these were from politically significant members, heavy stress would be imposed on the system.

Our analysis thus reveals a dynamic political system which gets something done; it processes demands. It is not just a set of structures that react supinely to stimuli; it is, rather, a set of interactions through which positive and constructive efforts may be taken to cope with situations that threaten to destroy it.

We might compare a political system to a huge, complex factory in which raw materials, in the form of wants are taken in, worked upon, and transformed into a primary product called demands. Some few of these demands are then found to be appropriate for additional processing through a variety of intermediary operations until they are ready to be converted into finished products, or outputs, called binding decisions. These outputs leave the system to act upon the society as a whole, with consequences that may make themselves felt subsequently through the generation of additional wants that seek entry into the system. This forms a closed-loop process, characterized as "feedback."

Regulators of Demands

There are two major means for regulating the initial flow of demands. One is bound up with the kind of political structure prevailing in the system; it determines <u>who</u> converts wants to demands, and therefore their number and content. The other relates to cultural norms. These establish <u>what</u> is allowed through; they consist of those rules of behavior which deal with what is or is not permissible in the system.

Every demand has a concrete and, in principle, determinable point of entry into a system through some member or group. Perhaps the most appropriate way to characterize these structural points in the system is to designate them as gateways regulating the flow along the demand channels. The gatekeepers, whether individuals or groups, form the key structural element in determining whether a want will be converted to a demand, a matter that is closely tied to the number of gatekeepers who regulate the admission process and the rules under which they operate.

Among the regulative means operating on the gatekeepers, one is especially

important: the cultural norms that inhibit or promote conversion. Without minimizing the importance of gatekeeping, we can say that many gatekeepers are themselves a product of their culture. Cultural norms act as the operating rules, deciding which grants will get through as demands. If a system is not to be exposed to possible stress from demand overload, the cultural norms must serve to reduce the number and modify the content of the wants that would otherwise be politicized.

While structural arrangements and cultural norms may regulate the entry of wants so as to prevent too many of them from seeking conversion through existing structures, the degree of stress on the system depends on other conditions as well. Stress may be reduced or even eliminated if the members of the system are willing and able to undertake measures to change the behavior of existing authorities, the structure of the system, or the cultural roles.

All wants are not automatically converted into demands, and many wants may be excluded by the structural and cultural means of regulation available at the beginning of the flow paths. Nonetheless, many systems may be faced with a larger volume of demands than they can process into decisions. To cope with such a situation, some means must be available to regulate the demands <u>after</u> they have entered the system, in order to prevent the major decision and action sub-systems from being overloaded. If efforts to reduce the number of wants that are converted to demands are not successful, the burden of accomplishing the reduction is transferred to intra-system structures. The capacity to cope with possible stress will depend upon the number, variety, and load-bearing capacities of demand channels and on the internal gatekeepers through whom demands are combined into overarching programs and policies, or telescoped into controversial issues.

<u>Support as an Input of Systems</u>

However successful a system may be in coping with stress from demands, another major input is essential to assure the continuance of the system as a set of processes for converting wants into outputs. This second input is <u>support</u>. The term <u>support</u> refers to a kind of transaction, other than demand, between a system and its environment. It offers us a relatively simple tool for analyzing a second major source of stress on a system.

The input of support appears in the form of both sentiments and behavior.

To obtain a rough measure of support, we could balance the number of members supporting and opposing a system, their power position, the intensity of their feelings, their capacity to express their feelings in action, and their readiness to do so under the circumstances.

Fluctuations in support may stress a system in one or all of three ways. First, support is vital for the persistence of the group of persons who share a division of political labor, an aspect of a system that will be identified as the political community. Second, without support it would be impossible to assure some kind of stability in the rules and structures through which demands are converted into outputs, an aspect that will be designated as the regime. And third, without support for at least some of the individuals holding political power, demands could not be processed into outputs. Most systems require some relatively stable set of authorities. These are the three objects of support--the political community, the regime, and the authorities.

Change in a system means change in one or another of these three objects of support, and only when all three change fundamentally and simultaneously can we consider that the former system has totally disappeared. Modifications in one or another of the three objects of support is a way by which a system can cope with stress from the environment and keep some kind of political system in operation for a particular society.

The Political Community

In speaking of the persistence of a political system, one implies at least that the members of the system show some minimal readiness to continue working together to solve their political problems. Otherwise there could be no expectation of compliance with any authoritative allocation of valued things. Political community refers to that aspect of a political system that we can call the political division of labor. The existence of a political system must include a plurality of political relationships through which the individual members are linked to each other and through which the political objectives of the system are pursued. The members are drawn together because they participate in a common structure and set of processes, however tight or loose the ties may be. To avoid any ambiguity as to who is or is not a part of this division of labor, each system provides criteria of member-

ship through territorial presence, legal definition, blood, subjection, kinship, or other means.

A member of a system extends support to his political community insofar as he stands ready to support it, actively or passively. A group of people who come together to draw up a constitution to regulate their political relationship--as in the case of the thirteen colonies in America--thereby indicate their intention to form a political community and to share a political division of labor. The particular structure of the relationship may change thereafter; the members of the system may be ranked, subdivided and rearranged politically; and the structural patterns may be altered. But as long as the members continue to evince an attachment to the overall group, they are supporting the same political community.

Political communities change when major groups within the community withdraw their support from the existing division of political labor. The American Civil War illustrates what occurs when an important segment of support disappears. Metropolitan France is an example of a political community which has experienced little change since the French Revolution, aside from minor fluctuations in its geographic boundaries, although France's regimes have undergone numerous drastic transformations.

"Political community" identifies and defines one of the major components of a political system. The idea of persistence and change of a political system makes sense only if the context indicates whether the reference is to the political community.

The Regime

In referring to the persistence or change of a political system, we may mean something quite different from persistence or change of the political community. The German political community remained relatively intact after the First World War and in 1933. Yet the system underwent fundamental changes when it shifted from the monarchy to the Weimar Republic in the first period and from the Republic to the Nazi order in the second.

Even if members of a group displayed the strongest feelings of mutual identification in a political community, they still must establish some regu-

larized method for ordering their political relationships. Ultimately, for the outputs to be accepted as binding, the members need to accept some basic procedures and rules through which controversy over demands can be regulated, and work out some ends that can at least generally guide the search for such settlements. I call this object of support the regime.

The regime represents relatively stable expectations, depending on the system and its state of change, with regard to the range of political matters, the rules or norms governing the way these matters are processed, and the position of those through whom binding action may be taken on these matters. Within this range, the politically relevant members are less likely to challenge the authority and validity of settlements arrived at, even though they may of course question their wisdom.

Not every system need be successful in stabilizing such a set of constraints on behavior, nor need it always be clear in any system what has been placed in this special category of expectations. Past practice may be undergoing challenge, and new areas of consensus may develop. Generally, however, if a system is to avoid turmoil or near-chaos, the basic ways of processing demands into outputs and agreement on the broad limits of these outputs must be stabilized. This is one of the primary conditions that will prevent deep and passionate conflict over day-to-day outputs from shattering a system.

The regime, as a set of constraints on political interaction in a system, may be broken down into three components: values, norms, and structure of authority. The values serve as broad limits to what can be taken for granted in the guidance of day-to-day policy without violating deep feelings of important segments of the community. It should be noted that, in general, the very nomenclature used to classify systems—democratic, communist, authoritarian, traditional, transitional, modernizing, autocratic, and the like—highlights differences in the value premises of such systems.

Norms specify the kinds of procedures that are expected and acceptable in the processing and implementation of demands. These are the ground rules for participating in all aspects of the political process, and they include more than the rules that are embodied in formal documents like written constitutions and legal codes. In fact, norms consist of two separable kinds of expectations: customary and legal. Both kinds of expectations help to provide a framework of order for political interaction; without them chaos could

scarcely be avoided. Customary expectations form a vast body of cultural expectations about how members ought to behave in a system. Not only are they not a part of a constitution or a legal code; they may, in fact, diverge fundamentally from the formally avowed principles.

The structures of authority designate the formal and informal patterns by which power is organized to make and implement authoritative decisions; they constitute the roles and relationships through which authority is distributed and exercised. It is patent that demands could not be negotiated through to outputs without a variety of structural means. Specialization of labor enables some recognized few to take the initiative to bring about adjustments in conflicting demands and to implement the resulting settlements. In some systems, these roles may be formally specified in an organizational or legal code; in others they may appear as informally developed patterns of leadership. But in each type or combination of types, the day-to-day control and responsibility for processing demands is undertaken through more or less stable sets of roles which tend to be complementary and which, as a set, are distinguishably different from other roles in the total political structure.

Roles in a structure of authority have a determinate relationship to each other and to the political roles in the system which are not a part of the structure of authority. Support is extended not only to single roles in the system but to the whole pattern of authority roles in the system. A person may support the Presidency or the Supreme Court in the United States as constellations of roles, regardless of who the incumbents may be.

The goals, norms, and structure of authority both limit and validate political actions, and in this way provide a context for political interactions. No system can maintain order without support for some kind of regime. This support must be given to each of its components. Persistence of a system as a means for converting wants to binding decisions depends, in part, therefore, upon its capacity to stimulate enough support to maintain a viable regime. If the politically relevant members are to be able to rally and commit human and other resources to the attainment of political outputs, they must share an understanding of matters that are subject to political action. They must also be willing to support rules through which differences may be negotiated, and structures through which the initiative and responsibilities may be undertaken.

The Authorities

There is also little likelihood that a system can survive if it fails to support occupants of the authority roles. In practice, we frequently identify authority as the government of a country or a group, but there is need for a term with a broader scope than that implied in the concept "government." We will, therefore, use the concept "authorities" to include members of a system who conform to the following criteria: they engage in the daily affairs of a political system, they are recognized by most members of the system as having the responsibility for these affairs, and their actions are generally accepted as binding as long as they act within the limits of their roles. Specifically, we refer to such occupants of authority roles as elders, chiefs, executives, legislators, judges, administrators, councilors, monarchs, and the like.

The authorities are the last of the three aspects of a political system. In subsequent discussion of persistence and change in a system, it will be understood that the reference is to one or more of the major elements of a political system just described: the political community, the regime, and the authorities.

We now turn to a discussion of those conditions that may lead to stress, and of the variety of typical responses through which systems may seek to cope with stress.

Stress

The persistence of a political system hinges not only on an appropriate regulation of the inflow of demands but on a second major condition, the maintenance of a minimal level of attachment for each of the three objects of political support--community, regime, and authorities. If the input of support falls below the necessary minimum, the persistence of the system will be endangered unless it adopts measures adequate to cope with the stress.

When existing systems of great stability are threatened with loss of support, the status quo may survive for long periods, unless a counter elite or other organized groups are available and ready to give direction to the disaffected. Apathy, inertia, and inadequate leadership have accounted for the persistence of political objects in many systems when the level of support is astonishingly low. But in the normal course of events, lack of support is the prelude to important changes of some kind.

Erosion of support may occur through a complex network of relationships among the elites rather than as a result of the withdrawal of support by members in a system. The support of all members of a system is not necessary for the persistence of a political object, nor is withdrawal of the support of all members necessary for its change. In many important instances, the support of only an influential few has been sufficient to perpetuate the system.

Numerous conditions contribute to the decline of support. Many of them may be summed up under one category: output failure. As a result of a basic condition in a system, to be described as political cleavage, the authorities may find themselves unable to provide adequate outputs.

Output failure may arise when the authorities fail to take action to meet the specific demands of the members of a system. But, even if members have put in no specific demands about a matter, output failure may still occur. Such is the case when the authorities fail to take action that anticipates conditions which may later arise and to which members of the system might then object. Also the authorities may take action which they interpret as a response to demands which, in fact, are considered by the affected members to be wrong.

Initially, discontent from output failure is likely to be directed toward the authorities. But if there is repeated failure, the dissatisfaction may shift to the regime and even to the political community.

Most output failures are caused by internal dissension and conflict among the members of the system. Cleavage may so divide the relevant members that they find themselves unable to cooperate, negotiate, or compromise their differences. However, the fact that cleavages create stress does not mean that diversity and active conflict among groups work only in this direction. Neither social diversity nor political cleavage is a synonym for disunity, for they may also help to integrate a system. Furthermore, many kinds of differences, including cleavages, may be complementary, compatible, or at least neutral with respect to each other. If different groups with conflicting demands have something to offer each other in trade for mutual support, the centrifugal forces set up by group cleavages may be eliminated or mitigated. Differences alone need not mean stressful conflict, if the differences are not competitive or mutually exclusive. Hence, tendencies arising out of diversity or cleavage may contribute to the input of support, and even to some

degree of consensus for a system, and need to be balanced against the opposite effects that they also induce.

Through the way it structures its regime, a system may select a number of alternative means for ameliorating the stress occasioned by cleavage. Groups may be entirely suppressed and the society atomized--an extreme tactic. But even then the initial conflicts in outlook might continue because of occupational, religious, regional, educational, or other differences, although they might not be expressed openly. Another method of reducing stress is to try to homogenize society by blending or erasing religious, linguistic, and other cultural differences.

On the other hand, diversity may be accepted and mechanisms devised to allow for its expression, in a context that moderates the stress of conflict. Through representative structures, varied and effective avenues may be provided for groups to express or negotiate their differences so that no group feels entirely excluded from a part in the effective political process. In these ways, a system may respond to cleavage so as to prevent the sources of support for the political objects from diminishing or evaporating entirely.

Diffuse Support

No system could rely exclusively on direct measures, such as those of modifying the structure and the norms of the regime, in order to alleviate cleavage or to compensate for output failure. Two other general categories of responses are constantly available to maintain a minimal level of support for its objects: diffuse support and specific support.

At times the input of support may flow as a consequence of specific satisfactions obtained from the system with respect to a demand that the members make, can be expected to make, or that is made on their behalf. This will be called specific support. An example is that of a trade union which seeks a higher minimum wage and persuades the legislature to approve it. The union members see a direct connection between their wants and the activities of the authorities, and they support the authorities because they have acted favorably on this particular issue.

We know from history that members of a system have tolerated long periods of frustration in the satisfaction of their wants without support falling below the minimal level and becoming stressful. Indeed, no regime or community can

depend exclusively or even largely on support as a return for specific and identifiable benefits. Other means of adaptation to stress are necessary.

Support that is not directly linked to specific satisfactions may be generated by efforts to instill a deep sense of legitimacy in the members for the regime as a whole and for individuals who act on behalf of it, by invoking symbols of the common interest, and by promoting and strengthening the degree to which members identify with the political community. The important characteristics of all three methods is that, since the support is an attachment to a political object for its own sake, it constitutes a store of political goodwill. As such, it taps deep political sentiments and is not easily depleted through disappointment with outputs.

The inculcation of a sense of legitimacy is probably the single most effective device for stimulating the flow of diffuse support in favor both of the authorities and of the regime. Legitimacy supports both a regime and the specific occupants of authority roles. Under most conditions, a belief in legitimacy is essential to the persistence of a system. No other source of support can assure such ready acceptance of the system's outputs, even when they fly in the face of demands. Nor is there any more secure way to regulate the cleavages that appear in all systems.

In many, although not all, systems an additional source of diffuse support is the conviction that there is something called public, common, or national interest, or public welfare, or the good of the tribe, or the good of "our people." Wherever the conception of a general interest actively operates, it helps to regulate or limit the disposition toward divisive behavior on the part of the politically relevant members of a system, by establishing common standards for evaluating outputs. However the members of a system may perceive the results of policies or administrative acts, a share idea of the common good will reduce one of the major sources of difference.

Finally, when members become discontented with the outputs of a regime, some may be drive to question the desirability of maintaining the political community in its existing form. Most systems typically anticipate such possible stress by striving to arouse and nurture among its members a sense of political community, or a sense of mutual political identification. This is the third basic source of diffuse support, as mentioned earlier.

Specific Support

The second major kind of action by which authorities seek to maintain support consists of a flow of outputs which have a direct relationship to specific demands of members. Such actions, if successful, generate specific suport.

The link between outputs and the input of specific support is much more direct than in the case of diffuse support. Yet these two kinds of support influence each other. Prolonged success in eliciting specific support may create deep general attachments to the various political objects. If a person feels favorably disposed toward an object for a number of specific reasons, he may develop an attachment to the object for its own sake.

We turn now to an examination of the processes by which outputs affect specific support.

Feedback

Outputs affect the persistence or change of a system through the influence they have on the level of support, either direct or derivative. The effect is direct when it meets present or anticipated demands of the members; it is derivative when it creates conditions that prevent dissatisfactions at some future date.

The mere existence of outputs will not prevent support from falling below some stressful threshold. We must discover what determines the effects that outputs have upon support. A decisive factor is the kind of information that is fed back to the authorities about the nature and consequences of their decisions and actions. A successful system must provide some means for bringing to the attention of the authorities, information about the state of the system and its environment and the results of actions already taken. Through such feedback the authorities can determine the extent to which their outputs are alleviating stress and increasing support.

The concept "feedback loop" is suggested here as a way of identifying not only the information that comes back to the system, but all the other actions which result from this information. Information feedback is a major mechanism through which stres is handled by the authorities, because the authorities are able to respond through the production of outputs. These outputs in turn have characteristic effects on demands and on support that are relevant for the input of specific support.

In brief, the relevant phases, in one complete cycle around a feedback

loop, are four: the outputs as stimuli, the feedback response, the information feedback about the response, and the output reaction to the feedback response. Each of these processes will be examined in turn. They represent modes of interaction between the authorities and those varied units that produce inputs both of support and demands. The interactions are diagrammed in Chart 2.

The Feedback Stimuli

Since we have been conceptualizing outputs as the mechanism through which

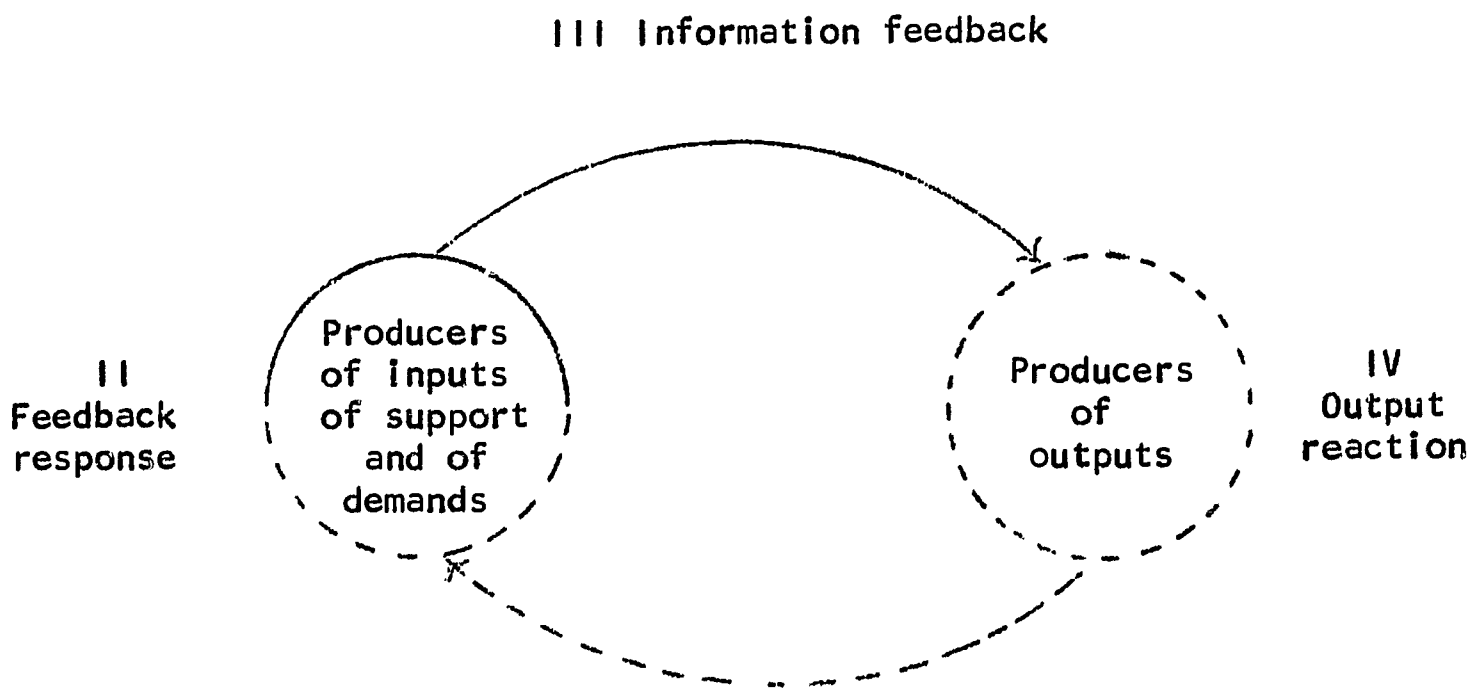


CHART 2

THE FOUR PHASES OF THE SYSTEMIC FEEDBACK LOOP

authorities may succeed in generating specific support for the political objects, it is appropriate to begin by examining the way in which outputs act as stimuli in the feedback process so that they may lead members to increase or reduce their input of support. I have labeled this Phase I of the feedback loop.

Feedback stimuli refer to a pattern of outputs over an interval of time. Through mediated or direct perception and experiences, the members receive outputs as stimuli. At any moment they may not and need not view outputs as

the basis for offering or withholding support, but we can expect that their sentiments toward the various objects in the system will be affected by outputs over a period of time. Accordingly, the stimulus in the next stage of the feedback cycle is an accumulated series of experienced outcomes.

The Feedback Response

The success or failure of outputs in winning the support of members depends upon the extent to which the outputs--both perceived outputs and experienced outcomes from unperceived outputs--are able to meet the current demands by preventing grievances from arising. Satisfaction derived from outputs that have met present or anticipated demands serves as a major means for inducing the input of specific support. Feedback stimuli consequently have a decisive effect on the succeeding input of demands as well as on the input of support; these inputs thus become closely intertwined.

The determination of the degree of feedback response, in terms of negative or positive support for the objects of a system, is not a simple matter. Yet judgments about the effects of feedback stimuli are constantly being made in practical political situations. What is clear is that outputs do not need to satisfy all of the members all of the time, or even most of the members most of the time. To maintain a level of support within the viable range of the system, the feedback stimuli may need to satisfy only some of the members--the politically relevant or influential ones in the system--some of the time.

Information Feedback

We now proceed to the question of how information about the input of support is communicated to the authorities and how this communication influences the level of specific support. Without such information, the authorities could not determine whether their prior outputs had achieved an effect, either negative or positive, and they would not know what their next steps should be. Delays and distortions in feedback response produce effects similar to the effects of ignorance.

When we examine the response phase of the systemic feedback loop, we find that it is not enough to know that the members do respond in one way or another to outputs. Their judgments about the actions of the authorities and their general attitudes toward the political objects need to be communicated to the

authorities if the latter are to be able to take relevant actions to increase the level of specific support.

Output Reaction

If information feedback is to be effective, it must enable the authorities to estimate their distance from their objectives and it must also suggest the kind of corrective actions that may be necessary to maintain a minimal level of support. The impact of the total feedback loop is, therefore, more than just a function of the adequacy of the returning information, its accuracy, or its discontinuity in time. It depends as well on whether the authorities are able and willing to react to the information in appropriate ways.

The reactions of the authorities depend initially on the degree to which they are responsive to the expressed demands. Response requires time. Authorities must show a concern for the feedback response of the politically relevant members, if they are to activate specific support, and they must act quickly enough to meet the needs of the situation.

In summary, the role of the authorities in the stimulation of specific support varies with the extent of their own responsiveness to fluctuations in demands and support as fed back from the input units, with time lags in the flow of information around the loop, with the availability of external resources, and with the kinds of native talents and organizational capabilities they possess and the storage and retrieval procedures they pursue.

As the producers of outputs the authorities represent the last link in the feedback loop. It is through their reactions to the continuous flow of information and actions through a system and its environment that a system seeks to control, regulate, modify, or fundamentally transform itself and its environment. It thereby displays variable capacities for persisting as a system that is able to perform the typical political tasks of converting wants into outputs.